



The New National Garden

An Update

For the U.S. Botanic Garden (USBG), the Architect of the Capitol (AOC), and The National Fund for the U.S. Botanic Garden, not to mention the founding sponsors and thousands of private citizens across the United States, the National Garden is at long last becoming a reality. Since construction began in July 2004 on this newest feature of the USBG, tremendous progress has been made.

The general contractor, William V. Walsh Construction Company, Inc., is now entering the final phases of construction, including stone masonry, perimeter fencing, and other finish work. Already completed is the utility work, including installation of new electrical service, stormwater connections, an infrastructure of steam lines, and an extensive piped drainage system 10 to 12 feet under the planned planting beds. The drainage system overlies the "no disturb" zone protecting the I-395 tunnel that runs underneath the National Garden site. "To protect this drainage system and the tunnel during installation, every one of the trees on the planting plan was carefully sited with regard to root-ball size," explains Holly Shimizu, Executive Director of the U.S. Botanic Garden.

From the horticulturist's point of view, the most significant milestone occurred when the new soil began to arrive in November 2005. The site had been used for a number of purposes since the mid-1800s, and after years of observing poor drainage, unhealthy plants, and a host of other problems, the USBG staff required that all existing clay fill be removed. It is being replaced with more than 7,500 cubic yards of soil, providing a root zone of 30 inches or more across the site. The soil, in two custom mixes specified by USBG Curator Bill McLaughlin, was donated by The Scotts Company, a founding sponsor. As for plants, USBG horticulturists are working through the proposed plant list to research sources for commercially available plants, and have propagated those that are not in the trade. Tree planting begins in February with shrubs, roses, and perennials following as spring progresses.

The Site Plan

When the National Garden opens on October 1, 2006, visitors will find a Lawn Terrace, Butterfly Garden, Rose Garden, First Ladies' Water Garden, and Regional Garden. A fence of limestone masonry and wrought iron will surround the site, and a landscaped aggregate path will define a central water feature. Accessible pathways will connect the various gardens, and pergolas will provide entrances and natural gathering sites. The Lawn Terrace, adjacent to the USBG Conservatory, will provide an intimate connection between indoor and outdoor spaces. Two rows of trees will shelter the garden path linking the Lawn Terrace and the Rose Garden. The Butterfly Garden will focus attention on these delightful creatures and their importance in maintaining diversity in the plant communities of North America. The Butterfly Garden will include inlaid paving stones that recognize those who helped to make the National Garden a reality.

The First Ladies' Water Garden will be a formal sculpted feature that will remind us of the cultural importance of fountains and gardens. Designed to honor the environmental and social progress fostered by our nation's First Ladies, the Water Garden's intricately formed granite pattern is based on the classic American colonial quilt pattern known as "Martha Washington."

The Regional Garden, featuring native plants of the Mid-Atlantic Piedmont and Coastal Plain, will truly be the "heart" of the National Garden. Long conceived as an "outdoor classroom," here is where the USBG staff and the board of the National Fund dreamed that children (and the young-at-heart) might learn about the importance of environmental stewardship as well as delight in the beauty and naturalness of a small creek with its associated wetlands and forests. A boardwalk crossing the creek will allow visitors an intimate connection to the flowing watercourse.



An amphitheater located at the western end of the Regional Garden will be a natural gathering place and venue for outdoor programs. Here, the watercourse from the Regional Garden will terminate into a tranquil pool behind the stage. The setting will afford the audience a kind of visual “metaphor,” the watercourse silhouetted by the Capitol: “We always viewed the National Garden as a place to nurture private reflection, as well as a national discourse, on the importance of gardens and the environment to our nation’s future,” comments Leone Reeder, co-chair of the board of the National Fund.

Project Stewards

The AOC, U.S. Botanic Garden, and National Fund look forward with great anticipation to the opening of the National Garden. They have worked together as a team to get the Garden designed and under construction. Without interested and generous donors, however, it would not have been possible. The National Fund is grateful for the commitment and patience of the National Garden's Founding Sponsors — the Heinz Family Foundation, The Scotts Company, Lowe's Home Improvement, HGTV (Home & Garden Television), and John Deere & Company — who provided much momentum. Leone Reeder also cites the generosity and efforts of members of the National Garden Clubs, Inc. "Their support has made a huge difference. I look forward to their visits when the National Garden opens, so I can thank them personally," she says.

Project History

Work on the National Garden began in the summer of 2004 with the erection of a construction fence around the three-acre site, which is adjacent to the USBG's historic Conservatory. Now, anticipation is building for the fence's removal, expected by June, affording the public's first look at the National Garden.

A thumbnail sketch of the National Garden's history begins in 1986 when the United States Congress designated the rose as our national flower with the passage of Public Law 99-449. Then on November 20, President Reagan signed Proclamation 5574, and the rose became the official National Floral Emblem. Almost immediately, talk began of creating a rose garden near the U.S. Capitol. A plan was conceived to create a tax-exempt nonprofit organization to raise private funds to finance its construction. In 1988, Public Law 100-458 created The National Fund for the U.S. Botanic Garden for this purpose. That the National Garden is now under construction after design competitions, design modifications, a radically changed security climate, value-engineering, and changing leadership is testament to the strength of a dream.

In March 2004, the National Fund presented Architect of the Capitol Alan Hantman, FAIA, a check for some \$9.3 million, all privately raised, to build the National Garden. Upon awarding the contract to William V. Walsh Construction Company, Inc., Hantman noted that the National Garden will not only be “a wonderful oasis on Capitol Hill, but also a natural extension of the U.S. Botanic Garden.” Walsh Construction brought a wealth of valuable experience, having worked on high-profile projects at the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial, and other historic sites in Washington. Choice of the contractor had been made carefully. The site presented a number of challenges, not the least of which is its location over the I-395 tunnel, a critical traffic artery crossing the capital city. Also, as the last remaining open area on the southeastern quadrant of the National Mall, the site was highly coveted. "We were keenly aware that there is great historic significance in placing a garden — rather than a building — at this location," says Marilyn Wong-Wittmer, AIA, the AOC's project manager for the National Garden.